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ABSTRACT

Effective leadership by school principals requires the ability to plan, organize, motivate, control, anticipate, orient, coordinate, implement, staff, make decisions, and program, all effectively. These abilities can be exercised in different ways, however, and several different directions, purposes, and attitudes can be emphasized by the leader. These differences determine leadership style. Principals who understand their own leadership styles and who are able to fit their leadership styles to their particular situations (or their situations to their styles) are more likely to be effective leaders. Among the factors that must be considered are the extent to which human relationships are stressed, the extent to which technical tasks and their completion are stressed, and the extent to which the leader can diagnose the situation in which leadership must be exercised. When making such a diagnosis, the leader must assess the knowledge of those doing the work, their ability and willingness to accept responsibility, and the leader's own expertise in the work situation in question. This publication reviews the developing concepts of leadership style, provides examples of the appropriate use of styles, and notes the value of understanding and using the concepts presented. (PGD)

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Leadership Is More Than Intuition

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A common definition of leadership goes something like this: Working with and through other people to achieve a particular goal.

Effective administration of the nation's elementary schools depends on the ability of principals to truly "live" that definition. The good news is that there are ways by which effective principals can become even better and by which those with limited leadership skills can learn.

Both can begin by acquiring an understanding of the different "styles" of leadership, and the conditions under which each might advisedly be put to practice. For best results, principals must become skillful in employing a range of differing leadership styles and applying the appropriate style to the demands of the particular situation. In the literature this would be referred to as "situational leadership" (Hersey and Blanchard 1982).

In discussions about leadership styles most principals say they believe in the participatory approach. In practice, however, this is not the way most principals behave. Typically, they seem instinctively to behave more in accordance with the line and staff industrial model. There is a reason, and it is this: They fail to search out people's skills and find ways of smoothing the way for teachers or parents or others to participate in significant decision making.

By definition, leadership entails moving an individual or a group in a particular direction. Those doing the leading usually have no doubt but that the direction taken will get all concerned into a better place or situation. While that is not always the case, stimulating motion in a particular direction is clearly an important aspect of leadership. Those involved do not remain standing still. Something happens.

Since movement with direction signals change, principals need to think about the implications of that concept to whatever enterprise they are engaged in, beginning with the implications of change to their own goals and priorities. They must in particular consider and as-

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sess both their dominant and back-up leadership styles, toward the possibility of discarding old styles so new ones can be learned and applied. One way principals can learn about their leadership styles is by taking the *LEAD Self* instrument (Hersey and Blanchard 1973).

While leading is one of the most fundamental functions of administration, others also are important—e.g., planning, organizing, motivating, controlling, anticipating, orienting, coordinating, implementing, staffing, decision making, and programming. A diagram of administrative functions and their interrelationships would show that each function is connected to every other function. So if principals are to be effective, they must provide leadership in the multiple facets of administrative management (Stephen J. Knezevich 1975).

Assume that a particular principal is really excellent at motivating people (as most probably are). Suppose, too, that this principal does not do very well with planning (and the evidence suggests that for most principals this is especially true about long-range planning). Finally, suppose that our principal is capable of doing a moderate job of orienting. We do not need to assume—we can be sure—that this principal is going to be less than a top-notch leader in the area of management. Like a chain, administrative leadership is only as strong as its weakest link.

Turning to another aspect of the management scene, there is a common notion that three different kinds of skills are needed at different levels in the decision-making structure. According to the model, the higher people go in an organization, the more they will need *conceptual* skills. No matter where a person is in the organization, that individual must have a full complement of *human* skills. *Technical* skills have been identified as being needed primarily at the lower levels in the organization. While this notion may seem to have a certain logic to it, the evidence is clear that possessing the full panoply of skills—conceptual, human, and technical—is important at all levels in the organization. The need for people at the supervisory level to maintain the technical skills of the personnel they supervise is demonstrated by the supervisors who take over the handling of long-distance calls when telephone operators strike.

Intuition has a place in administration but relying on it is perilous and foolhardy.

Applying this concept to the school, consider the principal who is going to try to persuade teachers to move to a psycholinguistic approach in teaching reading or to a discovery approach in teaching math. Will the principal need to have the technical skills to model the change if it is to be successful? Research indicates that even the most experienced, effective teachers welcome change and want leadership, but the leadership must come from a person who clearly has the know-how, i.e., possesses the technical skills (Myers 1985). So while the conceptual/human/technical skills model is useful in a broad sense, the practitioner needs to understand its nuances in order to use it as an instrument in achieving effective leadership.

Some principals claim to have a "sixth sense" that guides their behavior in a leadership situation. They evidently feel secure in flying by the seat of their britches—in moving forward on the basis not so much of reason as of intuition. Intuition has a place in the art and science of administration, but relying on it is necessarily perilous and thus foolhardy. It is also unnecessary, for research has led to the development of demonstrably effective approaches, while revealing why other models of leadership invite problems.

The leadership model most in use today is one-dimensional. On one end of a continuum is a mode of behavior that could be described as "democratic." The person considered to be a democratic leader would care about people and be sensitive to the pulls and pushes that are inevitable among groups of people working together. The source of authority for subordinates of such a leader comes from previously defined limits within which each individual is free to act. At the other end of this one-dimensional continuum is behavior that would be described as authoritarian. Subordinates of an authoritarian leader get their source of authority from the leader. The leader announces his decisions, and subordinates are expected to unquestioningly carry them out (Tannenbaum and Schmidt 1973).

In the 1940s, researchers at Ohio State University developed a two-dimensional model. In their work they categorized literally thousands of leader behaviors. They discovered that almost all of them could be placed in one or two categories. One category had to do with concern for getting the job done, a task-oriented kind of approach that they labeled "initiation of structure." The other category stressed concern for people, a relationship kind of orientation that they labeled "consideration." These two categories were not viewed as being at opposite ends of a continuum but rather as providing a two-dimensional approach to leadership (Stodgill and Coons 1957, Halpin 1959).

Related to the Ohio State findings was work done by researchers at the University of Michigan (Katz, Maccoby, and Morse 1950) and at the Research Center of Group Dynamics (Cartwright and Zander 1960). A model that merged the evidence of this research was popularized under the title Managerial Grid (Blake and Mouton 1964).

The managerial grid looks for "production" along one dimension and "concern for people" along the other, and tests were developed that measure where a particular individual fits in this grid. People are characterized as having one of five styles: *impoverished, task, middle-of-the-road, team,* or *country club.* In this approach a person identified as a "team" type of leader could simultaneously have a very high concern for followers and very high concern for task—rather like taking the two ends of the one-dimensional model and bending them around to touch each other.

The subsequent development of a three-dimensional approach to leadership was spurred by the fact that the labels for the Managerial Grid clearly are emotion-laden. Such terms as "impoverished" and "country club" suggest styles with which most principals would not want to be identifed.

The goal is to apply the right kind of leadership for the particular situation.

So two other researchers subsequently eased the situation by replacing the emotion-laden labels with four styles identified by the "quadrants" in which they were located (Hersey and Blanchard 1982). For instance, leaders whose dominant leadership style demonstrated a high concern for task achievement along with a high concern for their relationships with employees would be described not as having a "team" orientation but more laconically as being a high task/high relationship kind of leader. The change arose from a conclusion that leadership is in fact situational—that the effective leader is one who applies the kind of leadership called for by the particular circumstances, and that all styles may be effective if applied at the appropriate time. The four identified styles were: high task/low relationship, high task/high relationship, high relationship/low task, and low relationship/low task.

To illustrate the use of the three-dimensional model, consider the hypothetical case of a first-year kindergarten teacher new to the building. She has not taught for so much as a day, and she did her student teaching just last semester. She comes to the office and asks, "Ms. Principal, what are the first things to do with kindergarten children on the first day of school?" What should happen? Perhaps this particular principal puts her arm around the teacher's shoulders and says, "We are so delighted to have you on our staff. You were selected from 67 applications, and we think the university you attended has one of the finest teacher-training programs in the country. I know it is going to be a wonderful year for you and the children. I'm so excited for you!" No question—the teacher was amply stroked. But this high relationship/low task style of leadership was wildly out of kilter with the circumstances.

What that teacher needed was for the principal to say things like this: "Well, Kelly, the first thing to do is cut out 3-inch by 7-inch pieces of cardboard and write the kids' names on them in really big letters. Then punch holes in the two top corners and put in a piece of heavy yarn. Then, as children come into your room, hang the name tags around their necks so that you can see them from anywhere in the room. That way, you will be able to call each child by name. I think you should greet the mothers at the door and give the child a hug, then get each mother to turn around and go home. If the mother stays, her child is likely to cry. And for that matter, the mother is likely to cry, too. You need to keep in mind that some or even most of the mothers are giving up

their child for the very first time. The next thing you need to do is have activities that keep the kids occupied until they have all arrived and you are ready to begin . . ." And so on.

With that kind of response the teacher would surely feel more secure about what to do. Note that the principal devoted all of her attention to the business at hand and none to stroking, a pretty good example of high task/low relationship. Some people imagine that a high task behavior pattern must necessarily be unpleasant. Not so. Notice that the principal was never unpleasant with Kelly: She just told her what to do. The principal was cordial but decided that no psychological or physical hug was needed.

Now for another situation. In this scenario we are dealing with the new principal of John Dewey Country Day Alternative Elementary School, a "magnet" school. Parents may elect to bring to Dewey any child who meets criteria indicating exceptionality in the literary arts. Evidence of this exceptionality includes the child's ability to read at a grade-two level or above upon entrance to kindergarten, to write in sentences prior to entering grade one, and so on. The faculty of the school were especially selected because of their ability to stimulate children who have special facility with language. No teacher on the staff of 13 has less than a master's degree and five have a doctorate. A small school in a major city, Dewey has been in existence for 22 years, and more of its graduates have ultimately received National Merit Scholarships than those of any other elementary school in the city. Members of the faculty also have been judged to be outstanding and were recently awarded a $5,000 pay increase above their base salary. The faculty member who has taught there the shortest time has been on the job for seven years.

One of the first things the new principal does is call a faculty meeting. He declares that times are hard and that it is crucial for the school to maintain its high reputation so that no funding is lost. The principal announces that in order to achieve the proper level of visibility, he has decided it would be a good idea to review and research optimum teaching practices in dealing with children exhibiting literary talent, and to report the findings in the educational literature. Toward that end each teacher is to begin a research project on his/her teaching practice, then prepare an article suitable for publication. The article is to be on the principal's desk in five months or sooner. Furthermore, the principal will expect subsequent articles from each teacher, based on their research, at least twice a year. The principal concludes his remarks by saying, "For the good of the school, those teachers who are unable or unwilling to meet these criteria will be relocated in the district and new faculty will be secured as replacements."

Four criteria provide guidance for the style of leadership adapted to a particular group.

This episode is a depressing example of a high task/low relationship approach to leadership. Clearly it is not appropriate to the situation. Perhaps the principal's behavior was motivated by a sense of insecurity and a determination to make it clear that he was in command. In any case, the hand-picked, exceptionally well-trained, much experienced members of the faculty—people who had worked successfully together for a long period of time—could hardly be blamed for recoiling.

Clearly they would respond much more positively to a principal who said at the first faculty meeting, "My goal as your principal will be to support your efforts in whatever ways I can. Please channel your requests for materials, inservice, and other resources to me for action. It would be appreciated if you would take some time in the near future to educate me about the strategies you are using with your children and about the cooperative ventures you have undertaken with each other. Please feel free to stop by my office at any time to chat."

This response is an example of low relationship/low task leadership—an appropriate (and therefore effective) approach for this particular group. Such teachers do not need to be told what to do, nor do they need to be stroked for the good job they are doing. They know their work is good and are most likely self-actualized in relationship to that work.

There are four criteria for determining the style of leadership that principals ought to provide to a particular individual or group. The first criterion is, "Does the

group or the individual have the capacity to set high but attainable goals?" High, but attainable! Most elementary schools are organized in self-contained, graded classrooms. Suppose a principal wished to get a school faculty to work together in an organizational pattern that included team teaching, differentiated staffing, and multiple age grouping. Most members of the staff probably are not going to have the experience needed for dealing with such an organizational arrangement and thus would be "immature" in that situation; they would not know what "high, but attainable" goals consisted of.

The second criterion that determines the kind of leadership style needed is the ability of the particular individual or group to accept responsibility. And along with the *ability* to accept responsibility is a third criterion for determining leadership style—*willingness* to do so. Those in leadership roles have all experienced people who are willing but lack ability, and people who have the ability but are unwilling.

The fourth criterion for determining the appropriate style of leadership to use is task-relevant education and/or experience. For instance, most principals have never developed a school district budget. Most have had courses in school finance, however, and most understand the budgeting process. So if they were asked to develop such a budget, most could do it. (Practitioners and academicians often get into hassles over the issue of theory versus practice, and to no good end. The criterion is task-relevant education AND/OR experience. Either is good; obviously, both would be better.)

In any case, using the four criteria to determine the "maturity" of followers is in effect the same thing as diagnosing the leadership situation, and on that basis, deciding what leadership style is needed. So principals must become diagnosticians. To lead the staff most effectively they must be able to analyze and interpret the situation by considering these people's goal direction, readiness or willingness, ability, experience, and education.

Every leadership style is probably a good one if it is applied to the appropriate situation.

Bill is 6 feet 5. He can shoot jump shots from 15 feet and make 65 percent of them. He can turn either right or left and shoot. He can jump 25 inches off the floor from a standing position. John is 6 feet 2. From 15 feet his shooting accuracy is 60 percent. Yet John is the starting center and Bill is the first person on the reserves.

Why would a coach make such a decision? Not for "political" reasons; John is not the son of a school board member. Nor is it that John has better leadership skills—Bill is a good leader too. What is it, then? The answer is that John is a *diagnostician.* John can always tell when he can move to the right and get off a shot before his opponent can block it. Bill can't tell—he is not yet a diagnostician.

Being a diagnostician involves the third dimension of leadership. Principals must become adept at using the four criteria to determine the maturity of the groups and individuals with whom they work. They must diagnose the situation so that they can apply the right leadership style; it is their application of the "right" style that determines effectiveness—the third dimension. The more times they are right in diagnosing leadership situations and applying appropriate leadership behavior, the more effective they are in their leadership efforts.

When Hersey and Blanchard (1982) talked about diagnosing, they gave the word "maturity" a somewhat different meaning than that in common usage. In talking about maturity they had in mind a person's experience and education as these matters applied to a given kind of circumstance. Principals have to think of a person's maturity in terms of how well prepared that person is to function in a particular situation. When people are low in maturity (like that kindergarten teacher who wanted to know what to do on the first day of school) the kind of leadership called for is high task/low relationship. Leaders can actually move people through what is called a *life-cycle arc* that elevates them to higher and higher levels of maturity.

This process is related to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the notion of helping people move to the level of self-actualization—to the point where they do not need anyone to give them strokes or tell them what to do (Maslow 1965). The life-cycle is pretty close to that same idea. It is a way of helping people to grow, which

suggests that this three-dimensional model of leadership can also become a staff development plan.

Principals need to understand, however, that they are not called upon to do it all. Only a very few principals are likely to develop the ability to exercise all four leadership styles, and only a few of this few would have equal skill with each style. Some effective principals may have only *one* leadership style—plus the ability to adapt the situation to their style.

Consider a principal whose only style is high task/low relationship and who is located in an urban or suburban district with many schools. Such a principal might propose that the district assign him/her all the beginning teachers, since beginning teachers need more task leadership. The result would be a "Portal" school—a school of entry for those new to the system. Beginning teachers could teach there for one or two years and then be reassigned to wherever they would be needed in the district. By such a strategy the principal could adapt the *situation* to his/her style.

It seems reasonable to suggest that every style is a good one if applied in the appropriate situation. While few principals have all four leadership styles in their repertoire, most probably have the potential for two or three. The challenge is to conscientiously strive to capitalize on that potential and thus expand their capacity to strengthen their school's program.

In any case, it is clear that there are schools that are more effective and schools that are less effective. As the research has demonstrated, the former are administered by more effective leaders—individuals who are skilled in developing approaches that respond to the needs of their followers and to the context in which they labor.

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